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Work of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its forty-second session (see E/2011/24), the present report is submitted, summarizing the main conclusions of the seventeenth and eighteenth sessions of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, held in New York on 21 February 2011 and in Luxembourg from 7 to 9 September 2011, respectively. The Commission may wish to take into account the views of the Committee in its discussions under the relevant agenda items. Furthermore, the Commission is invited to take note of the report, in particular the proposed global inventory of statistical standards.

* E/CN.3/2012/1.

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I. Introduction

1. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities held two sessions in 2011. The seventeenth session of the Committee was held in New York, on 21 February 2011, in the context of the forty-second session of the Statistical Commission, while the eighteenth session of the Committee, hosted by Eurostat, was held in Luxembourg, from 7 to 9 September 2011. Both meetings were co-chaired by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Henri Laurencin, Head of the Development Statistics and Information Branch of the Division on Globalization and Development Strategies) and Eurostat (Pieter Everaers). The present report summarizes the main conclusions of the seventeenth and eighteenth sessions of the Committee.

2. In addition to holding two annual sessions, the Committee operates actively between sessions through a network of task teams, following up on the decisions taken during the regular sessions. The established teams choose their own working arrangements and hold their own meetings, if appropriate. In this manner, concrete progress is made in the areas that are currently under discussion by the Committee, namely, the development of shared practices regarding human resource management, quality management, use of different data sources, the release of microdata and food security statistics. Also, the task teams work on specific coordination tools, such as reporting on technical cooperation activities, and elaborate tangible products such as the global inventory on statistical standards. All these areas of work will be further described in detail in the following sections. Task teams prepare documents on the progress and results of their work and report back to the Committee as a whole for decision-making at its regular sessions. As the secretariat of the Committee, the Statistics Division works closely with the co-chairs, facilitates communication among Committee members and prepares the reports of the regular sessions and the annual report to the Statistical Commission; it also maintains the Committee's page on the Division's website http://unstats.un.org/unsd/accsub-public/workpartner_ccsa.htm).

II. Membership

3. At its seventeenth session, the Committee considered the formal application for membership received from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The representative from the Office briefly introduced their statistical programme and expressed the commitment of the Office to the "Principles governing international statistical activities". In line with its terms of reference, the Committee's Secretary confirmed that the meeting had the necessary quorum of two thirds of the current membership of the Committee. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was then unanimously admitted to the Committee and welcomed by the co-chairs.

4. The Committee has now 38 members (see annex I for a list), 33 of whom attended at least one session in 2011.

III. Work of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

A. Special session on quality and dissemination

5. In conjunction with its eighteenth session, the Committee organized a half-day special session on quality and dissemination, entitled "Best practices in communicating statistics: making statistics meaningful for users" and included presenters from within and from outside the Committee, namely, from Google and Bloomberg News. The special session was jointly organized by Eurostat and the European Central Bank and was chaired by the Deputy Director General of Statistics at the European Central Bank (Werner Bier). It was organized in two parts.

6. Part 1 focused on "Using websites as a communication channel" and featured presentations by Eurostat, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Part 2 focused on "Communication with frequent users and media" featuring presentations by Google, the European Central Bank and Bloomberg News.

7. The presentations and discussion looked at the theme of "making statistics meaningful for users" from different user perspectives. Organizations are increasingly making efforts to identify their various external user groups, their statistical needs and working processes as part of developing strategies to target those frequent users with tailored statistics. Some user segments could be easily identified through the official mandate of an organization, but most external users' needs are not fully known. It was stressed that communication of statistics to external users was indeed a two-way dialogue in which statisticians need to understand the user needs and producers needed to inform their users about the available statistics. Most organizations seemed to tailor their electronic dissemination or website to their core users' profiles and, with few exceptions, disseminate the data they produce themselves. There is a continuous challenge to make effective use of newly available technological tools. Issues such as different, competing sources for same data and different pricing policies applied in the dissemination of data were also mentioned.

8. The Committee acknowledged the importance of using websites as one of the main communication channels to external users. This also implies an active dialogue with the users on their needs and on the tools to support them. It would be beneficial to exchange such findings within the Committee.

B. Human capital

9. Following a special session on human capital, organized in conjunction with its sixteenth session, held in Vienna in 2010, the Committee had decided to establish two task teams for addressing the challenges in human resources management in the specific environment of international organizations. Task team 1, led by the World Trade Organization, was to explore the best possible ways for identifying talent pools and to review the relevant experiences in this field. Task team 2, led by the Statistics Division, was to work on training of international statisticians, staff exchange and mobility. Both task teams presented progress reports to the seventeenth session and more comprehensive reports to the eighteenth session.

10. With regard to the work of task team 1, the discussion at the eighteenth session focused on the following issues:

(a) While there are significant communalities in the work of international statisticians, there are also differences, resulting from the types and sizes of international organizations, with more specialized agencies requiring statisticians with a higher degree of subject matter specialization. In this context, the increasing importance of conceptual knowledge and of the ability to communicate and translate the information in understandable language was mentioned;

(b) When developing profiles for international statisticians, the group should not only focus on the entry-level position but should also look at a profile for statisticians with 10 years of career experience;

(c) The development of certain types or categories of profiles was considered to be helpful in facilitating mobility and the exchange of staff between organizations, which is increasingly promoted by organizations. In this context, the envisioned network of international statisticians was seen as a partner in the development of such profiles;

(d) Means of outreach to academia need to be further explored;

(e) The Committee should consider sharing its findings on the requirements of international statisticians at the next conference of the International Association for Official Statistics, to be held in Kyiv in 2012.

11. The Committee requested task team 1 to develop, in collaboration with the network of statisticians in international organizations, a selection of typical job profiles for international statisticians with a view to better communicating the work of international statisticians. Furthermore, the Committee requested the task team to develop some concrete proposals on how outreach and cooperation with academia and relevant training institutions could be improved.

12. With regard to the work of task team 2, the discussion focused on the exchange of information regarding existing staff development strategies. Currently, there are only a few staff exchange mechanisms and practices in existence. The Committee requested task team 2 to complete its analysis of training opportunities for international statisticians and make this information available on the Committee's website. It also requested the task team to document the successful practices and experiences of staff exchange and mobility, as well as the major obstacles. Furthermore, the Committee requested the task team to develop concrete proposals on how to expand such opportunities, especially by engaging relevant human resources units more effectively.

13. Both task teams are expected to report back to the Committee at its nineteenth session.

C. Establishment of a network of statisticians working in international organizations

14. The Committee established a task team, led by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, to develop a structure and to examine the administrative, legal and financial aspects of a network among statisticians working in international organizations.

15. At its seventeenth session, the Committee endorsed the task team's proposal to establish an interim secretariat of the network, which is hosted by Eurostat, and to appoint a representative from the World Bank (Misha Belkindas) as project leader and coordinator. In addition to the secretariat and the project leader, the network continued to rely in its work on the reference group established before the sixteenth session of the Committee.

16. At its eighteenth session, the Committee considered a progress report prepared by the project leader and the secretariat. During the extensive discussion, some members voiced continued scepticism whereas others favoured a pragmatic approach of "just get started".

17. The Committee decided to entrust the co-chairs with nominating four key members of the reference group, who will be tasked to take forward the process, and with contacting Committee members to request that they publicize the network in their respective organizations in order to create an extended reference group. The Committee further decided that the moderators (as selected by the co-chairs) should set up a LinkedIn group, approach members of the expanded reference group and launch the discussion. The Committee also decided that the key members should consider options for a more formal structure for the group and report to the Committee, at its nineteenth session, on both of these items, at which point the Committee will reconsider setting up an International Statistical Institute committee as a possible means for the network. The Committee welcomed and accepted an offer by Eurostat to continue to provide limited secretariat support for the network.

D. Global inventory on statistical standards

18. At its forty-first session, held in February 2010, the Statistical Commission had given the Committee the mandate to develop and maintain an inventory of global statistical standards (see E/2010/24, decision 41/111). The Committee's project team, consisting of the Economic Commission for Europe, the Statistics Division, the World Bank and the International Labour Organization, with support from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía), submitted a progress report to the Commission at its forty-second session (E/CN.3/2011/30).

19. At its seventeenth session, the Committee considered a concept note on terms of reference for the project to develop a global inventory of statistical standards, prepared by ECE, and the Statistics Division presented a prototype of the inventory. The concept note provided a detailed description of the outputs of the first phase of the project in terms of its coverage and scope, classification of standards, information content model, functionality, maintenance and platform. The 2008 System of National Accounts standard was used for demonstrating the prototype.

20. With respect to the initial scope of the inventory, the Committee decided to take a practical approach, focusing on standards adopted by relevant intergovernmental statistical bodies, key official methodological publications of Committee members and internationally agreed upon statistical classifications. Standards are sorted according to the classification of statistical activities developed for the Database of International Statistical Activities, maintained by ECE, whereby, in the interest of helping users to find relevant standards, it is possible to cross-reference a particular standard to more than one statistical area. Regarding the

information content for each standard, a basic model is being used to focus on key information elements for each standard, namely, full name, version, date of adoption and/or publication, previous versions, a brief description, details of the organization(s) that maintain the standard, statistical domain(s), type of standard, reference/link, language(s) (refer also to annex II). By limiting the information elements to the essential minimum and by providing, wherever possible, a link to the standard and/or publication itself and/or web pages that provide additional background information on the standard, it is hoped that the inventory can be maintained. A simple wiki platform provides the technical backbone for the inventory. It allows the user to search by keywords, statistical domains or organizations. The inventory will be developed in English only, at first. Bearing in mind the Statistical Commission's concern about access to multilingual information, an assessment of how multilingualism can best be realized will be made at the end of the initial phase. It should be noted in this context, that wherever language versions of the actual standard are available on the Internet, the links are already being introduced into the system. As a certain amount of domain-specific knowledge will be needed to maintain the inventory, a single administrator cannot be expected to follow developments in all statistical domains. For this reason an editorial board has been suggested that may be supported by domain editors, with expert knowledge in specific statistical domains. The Statistics Division will host and administer the inventory website, and other Committee members, as well as national agencies, are strongly encouraged to later refer and link to it.

21. At the eighteenth session of the Committee, the Statistics Division presented an advanced prototype of the inventory, which was being populated with 95 standards, contributed by 12 organizations. The Committee provided guidance on a number of specific technical issues and approved a timeline for the finalization of the initial version of the inventory. In particular, the Committee agreed that the inventory would be presented to Member States during the forty-third session of the Statistical Commission through a technical background document, as well as through a live demonstration during a side event. A proposal for a future governance structure for the inventory, based on an editorial board, will be presented to the Committee at its nineteenth session.

E. Statistical capacity-building activities of international organizations in developing countries

22. On the basis of a round-table discussion, the Committee, at its sixteenth session, had reached a consensus that despite the good progress achieved in coordinating statistical capacity-building activities since 2006, the issue was important and required continued attention. Therefore, the Committee had a more extensive discussion on issues of coordination of capacity-building activities at its eighteenth session, on the basis of a document prepared by the World Bank and the secretariat of the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) and an oral presentation made by a discussant from Eurostat.

23. The Committee welcomed the initiative to raise the visibility of statistical work in the context of development policy. In particular, the Committee provided comments to assist in the finalization of the proposed "Busan Action Plan for Statistics".

24. With respect to the development of effective reporting mechanisms for technical cooperation activities of international organizations, the Committee, at its seventeenth session, took note of a paper on the *Partner Report on Support to Statistics — PRESS*, presented by the secretariat of PARIS21. The paper outlined the experience of PARIS21 in developing a logical framework (logframe) and provided an overview of the logframe's content and objectives and identified indicators and lessons learned from the process. Eurostat presented an example of analytical use of the information contained in the PRESS report for 2010.

25. PARIS21 thanked the Committee members who reported and provided feedback to the 2010 PRESS round and noted, in that regard, that the exercise will be a good coordination tool only if information is provided by all financial and technical partners. Committee members were encouraged to respond to the 2011 round of PRESS as well as to the survey on the role of PARIS21 in supporting statistical development. Responses will assist PARIS21 in monitoring the impact of its work and in adapting its approach to better suit the needs of the Partnership. In this regard, the Committee members were informed that the newly added questions in the PRESS questionnaire for monitoring the progress with the logframe, namely, on coordination mechanisms and on alignment of aid with National Strategies for the Development of Statistics, will be collected also as part of the 2011 PRESS round.

F. Use of different data sources for the production of international statistics

26. In the context of its earlier discussion on the use of non-official data in imputations and/or estimations made by the international organizations, based on a report prepared by the World Trade Organization, the Committee had concluded that a new task team should be established, which, on the basis of existing work, would formulate best practices in combining different data sources for the production of international statistics, taking into account the issues of transparency of methods used, stability of data sources and quality assurance. This task team was led by ECE.

27. At its seventeenth session, the Committee took note of a progress report prepared by ECE in consultation with the task team. The Committee agreed that the paper was good but not conclusive, as the topic relates to many different processes in the practice of international organizations, which are partly administrative, political or analytical in nature. In this regard, the preparation of a set of guidelines on using different data sources for production of international statistics was thought by some members not to be feasible nor manageable. Instead, a development of case studies or focusing on specific areas of estimation was proposed.

28. At its eighteenth session, the Committee listened to an oral report by ECE and accepted the offer by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to take over the lead of the task team in the future. Given the continuing importance of the topic to some members, the Committee requested the task team to continue its work and report back to the Committee at its nineteenth session.

G. Dissemination of microdata by the international organizations

29. At its seventeenth session, the Committee took note of a paper prepared by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, on behalf of the task team, on the topic of the dissemination of microdata. The task team had carefully analysed the existing principles and guidelines of good practices in managing statistical confidentiality and found that: (a) they address primarily the work of national statistical offices; (b) the operational aspects of microdata access in the context of international organizations have not been discussed as yet; and (c) the existing principles and guidelines for national statistical offices in the majority of cases can be reformulated to serve the purposes of international organizations, except in two cases, namely, the lack of a legal basis at the international level for defining access to microdata and the case of ownership over the data sets, which would require more detailed discussions by international organizations. The task team advised the Committee that it would be useful to have a debate in the Committee's forum on this topic.

30. Subsequently, the Committee, at its eighteenth session, took note of the oral report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, focusing on a questionnaire developed by the task team, which had been sent out for comments earlier and had been made available on the Committee's website. The Committee also warmly welcomed the United Nations Children's Fund to join the task team and accepted the Fund's offer to chair the task team in the future. The Committee requested the task team to finalize the questionnaire, continue its work and report back to the Committee at its nineteenth session.

H. Food security statistics

31. The Committee, at its seventeenth session, took note of an oral report made by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on food security statistics. FAO informed the Committee about the initiatives that had been implemented for strengthening the food security information system at different levels and reiterated that there is a need for an increased role of the global statistical system in the development of an information system for food security and more proactive initiatives by the statistical units of international agencies in setting up the agenda of their respective organizations on this topic. In view of the global importance of food security, the Committee advised FAO that they may want to bring the issue to the attention of the Statistical Commission. At its eighteenth session, the Committee considered a more comprehensive document on standard setting and international coordination in food security statistics, prepared by FAO.

32. The Committee decided to establish a task team on food security statistics and asked it to contribute to a possible document for the forty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission, to be held in 2013, at which the Commission hoped to discuss this topic. The task team will be led by FAO. The task team was also requested to report back to the Committee, at its nineteenth session, with proposed terms of reference and suggested procedures.

I. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities and the global statistical system

33. In accordance with a request, made during the sixteenth session, held in Vienna, to be more proactive and forward-looking in setting its future agenda, the Committee, at its seventeenth session, was briefed by the Statistics Division about the multi-year programme of work of the Statistical Commission. The Committee identified two ways to be more proactive in the future: (a) by formulating a common position on an item, already included in the programme; or (b) by proposing new items.

34. Eurostat briefed the Committee on the status of the work of the Friends of the Chair on the barriers to the implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts, during both sessions of the Committee in 2011. At its eighteenth session, the World Bank briefed the Committee on the status of the current round of the International Comparison Programme. FAO briefed the Committee on the development of an action plan on improving agricultural statistics. The Statistics Division presented its work programme in support of the newly established United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management. Other cross-cutting issues on which information was exchanged included the status of the current census round, the Busan Action Plan, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20 to 22 June 2012, and the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) initiative.

J. Other issues discussed

35. The Committee, at its seventeenth session, took note of a report by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific on the first meeting of partners for statistical development in Asia-Pacific, which presented the outcome from the establishment of the first informal regional mechanism for donor coordination for statistical development. During the meeting, held in December 2010, the partnership was institutionalized. It had its second meeting as a side event to the eighteenth session of the Committee. In this regard, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific proposed to the Committee to allocate time in the agenda of its future annual meetings for a brief discussion on the issues of regional coordination.

36. The Committee, at its eighteenth session, took note of the information note on the Household International Migration Surveys submitted by Eurostat. The document was introduced by the author, describing the project proposal, which aimed to collect data in the MEDSTAT countries on the determinants and consequences of international migration, covering many aspects including out-migration, return migration, forced migration, migration of highly skilled persons, irregular migration, type and use of remittances, and the behaviour, attitudes, perceptions and cultural values of people with regard to international migration.

37. Also at the eighteenth session, the Statistics Division briefed the Committee on the forthcoming forty-third session of the Statistical Commission. Of particular relevance for the Committee was the announcement, that, after consultation with the Member States, the provisional agenda item on the "Principles governing

international statistical activities" had been postponed, for consideration after the conclusion of the review of the "Fundamental principles of official statistics", most likely in 2013 or 2014.

38. Furthermore, the Statistics Division invited the Committee to send any suggestions on how the Committee's website could be improved to the secretariat.

39. Regarding attendance at the meeting, the Committee noted with regret that the United Nations Development Programme was not present at the eighteenth session. The Committee asked the co-chairs to convey this regret to senior management of the United Nations Development Programme and urge them to attend the Committee's meetings in the future.

K. Administrative matters

40. The Committee thanked the two co-chairs, as well as the entire team for their effective leadership. Subsequently, Mr. Laurencin was re-elected as co-chair for a second term. In addition, Mr. Bier was elected the second co-chair of the Committee for the period 2012-2013.

41. The Committee agreed that its nineteenth session would be held in New York, on the morning of 27 February 2011, in conjunction with the forty-third session of the Statistical Commission. The Committee was pleased to accept the European Central Bank's offer to host the twentieth session in Frankfurt in September 2012.

Annex I

Members of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities*

African Development Bank

Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics

Asian Development Bank

Bank for International Settlements

Caribbean Community

European Central Bank

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

International Atomic Energy Agency

International Labour Organization

International Monetary Fund

International Telecommunication Union

Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century

Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries

EUROSTAT

Economic and Statistical Observatory of Sub-Saharan Africa

United Nations Children's Fund

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

United Nations Development Programme

Economic Commission for Africa

Economic Commission for Europe

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

United Nations Environment Programme

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

United Nations Human Settlements Programme

* As of November 2011.

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

United Nations Population Fund

Statistics Division

World Bank

World Health Organization

World Tourism Organization

World Trade Organization

Annex II

The information content model for the Global Inventory of Statistical Standards

Element	*Description*
Name	Full official name of the standard, plus any alternative names and acronyms
Version	The version of the standard (where applicable)
Valid from	Date on which the standard was adopted (or published)
Previous versions	References and links to previous versions of the standard
Description	Brief description of the standard, including objective, intended use and relationship to other standards
Organization responsible for maintenance	The organization or group responsible for approving and maintaining the standard
Statistical domain(s)	The domains in which the standard is used (according to the Database of International Statistical Activities classification of statistical activities)
Type of standard	Categories: (a) Concepts and definitions (b) Classifications (c) Methodologies and procedures (Note: other categories can be added as needed)
References	References and links to the standard and any other material that helps in understanding or implementing it
Language	Language(s) in which the standard is published
Information last updated/validated	The date on which the information above was last updated or verified to be correct